

FACTSHEET

Animal Care

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service

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The Horse Protection Act

The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) enforces the Horse Protection Act (HPA). The HPA is a Federal law that prohibits horses subjected to a process called soring from participating in exhibitions, sales, shows, or auctions. The Act also prohibits drivers from hauling sored horses across State lines to compete in shows.

Soring

Soring—a painful practice used to accentuate a horse's gait—is accomplished by irritating the forelegs through the injection or application of chemicals or mechanical irritants. When it walks, a sored horse responds by quickly lifting its front legs to relieve the pain. Sored horses sometimes develop permanent scars.

In the 1950's, owners and trainers wanting to improve their horses' chances to win at shows used soring. Because sored horses gained a competitive edge, the practice became popular and widespread in the 1960's. Public outcry over the inhumane practice led to the passage of the Horse Protection Act in 1970 and its amendment in 1976.

The HPA ensures that responsible horse owners and trainers will not suffer unfair competition from those who sore their horses and that the horses will not be subjected to the cruel practice of soring.

Although the HPA covers all horse breeds, Tennessee Walking horses and other high-stepping breeds are the most frequent victims of soring.

Responsibility

Responsibility for preventing sored horses rests with owners, trainers, riders, sellers, and managers of the show or sale. Most horse-industry organizations and associations strictly prohibit members from soring their animals.

Designated Qualified Persons

To facilitate enforcement of the HPA, APHIS has established the Designated Qualified Person (DQP) program. DQP's are trained and licensed by a USDA-certified horse industry organization or association to detect sored horses. DQP's are APHIS-accredited veterinarians with equine experience, or they are farriers, horse trainers, or other knowledgeable equestrians. DQP's are hired by the managing directors or administrators of a show or sale to assure that sored horses are not allowed in the ring.

DQP's are responsible for barring from shows horses that do not meet Federal regulations under the HPA. Without DQP's, show management assumes full legal responsibility for disqualifying sored horses before awarding prizes and before customers view horses at sales or auctions.

Monitoring DQP's and Enforcing the HPA

Horse organizations can revoke the license of DQP's if their inspections do not meet HPA standards. The APHIS inspection team is not present at every show but conducts unannounced inspections. APHIS can use information supplied by private citizens to prosecute violators.

The APHIS inspection team includes veterinarians, animal health technicians, and investigators. The veterinarians observe horses during a show and can examine any horse for signs of soring or violation of the regulations.

Signs of Soring

APHIS inspection team members look for abnormal sensitivity or insensitivity in horses they suspect of being sored. The horses may exhibit swelling, tenderness, abrasions, bleeding, or oozing of blood or serum. APHIS pays particular attention to the area of the coronet band, the area above the hoof, to the front and rear pasterns, and to the bulb of the heel—favorite places for chemical soring. They also look for training aids that are too heavy and hard. Heavy, rigid devices banging on the pastern during repeated workouts can sore sensitive horses.

Penalties

Criminal or civil charges can be brought against violators. If convicted, violators can spend up to 2 years in prison, receive penalties of up to \$5,000, and be disqualified for 1 or more years from the right to show, exhibit, or sell horses through auction sales. Trainers can be disqualified for life. Industry and certified organizations impose their own sanctions in addition to Federal proceedings.